



GREEN SPRING GARDENS PARK

PLANT INFORMATION SHEET

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RECOMMENDED HARDY FERNS FOR THE WASHINGTON, D.C. AREA

Ferns grace our shade gardens with their beautiful foliage, providing a myriad of colors, forms, and textures. In spite of the fact that ferns do not flower, they provide considerable seasonal interest in our gardens. The youthful fiddleheads in the springtime have a wonderful prehistoric look to them, which is not surprising because they are ancient plants. Ferns have foliage in a variety of colors, from light green to dark green, and some ferns are even brushed with reds and grays (e.g., Japanese painted fern). Fall colors of deciduous ferns range from tawny brown to rich russet to warm yellow. Evergreen ferns enliven the winter landscape with their green fronds.

The following are useful definitions:

- **Border** – a bed that is longer than wide and planted with trees, shrubs, flowers, ferns, and other types of plants. May be backed by walls, fences, or hedges and is chiefly viewed from one side. Free-standing island beds are a variation on the border.
- **Cultivar (cv.)** – a cultivated variety selected by humans and designated by single quotes (e.g., 'Pictum'). A **variety (var.)** or **subspecies (subsp.)**, in contrast, is found in nature and is a subdivision of a species.
- **Full shade** – the amount of light under a dense deciduous tree canopy or beneath evergreens.
- **Naturalistic use** – native plants that, when properly sited, perform well with minimal care; best used in an informal design that suggests a natural landscape.
- **Part shade** – the amount of light in an area shaded part of the day, among deciduous trees with high branches, among deciduous trees with foliage that is not heavy, or among thinned deciduous woods.

Most ferns prefer light shade to part shade. In fact, most ferns will not thrive in deep shade. Most ferns prefer moist, slightly acidic (pH below 7) soils, although some prefer or tolerate other cultural conditions. The following is a list of commercially available ferns that perform well in the Washington, D.C. area in borders and woodlands. Never buy ferns collected from the wild: buy only propagated plants. Whether a fern is evergreen, semi-evergreen, or deciduous is listed under comments, as well as any special cultural requirements or tolerances. Species that are native to Virginia are marked with an asterisk (*).

FERNS FOR BOTH BORDERS AND MORE INFORMAL USE

Scientific Name	Common Name	Comments
<i>Adiantum pedatum</i> *	Maidenhair Fern	Deciduous; add gypsum or lime to the soil if soil is acid (likes calcium & tolerates alkaline soil [pH above 7])
<i>Athyrium felix femina</i> subsp. <i>asplenioides</i> * <i>A. niponicum</i> 'Pictum' (‘Ghost’ is a hybrid between the above two species)	Lady Fern, Southern Lady Fern Japanese Painted Fern	Deciduous; tolerate alkaline soil; lady fern tolerates full shade
<i>Deparia acrostichoides</i> (<i>Athyrium thelypteroides</i>)* <i>D. petersonii</i> (<i>Athyrium japonicum</i>)	Silver False Spleenwort, Silvery Glade Fern Black Lady Fern, Japanese False Spleenwort	Deciduous
<i>Diplazium</i> (<i>Athyrium</i>) <i>pycnocarpon</i> *	Glade Fern, Narrow-leaved Glade Fern	Deciduous; tolerates full shade; likes lime but also does well in acid soils
<i>Dryopteris affinis</i> × <i>filix-mas</i> (× <i>complexa</i>) ‘Robust’ (sometimes sold as ‘Undulata Robusta’) <i>D. × boottii</i> * (<i>D. cristata</i> × <i>intermedia</i>) <i>D. carthusiana</i> * <i>D. celsa</i> * <i>D. cristata</i> * <i>D. dilatata</i> <i>D. erythrosora</i> <i>D. goldiana</i> * <i>D. ludoviciana</i> (native to NC, etc.). <i>D. × australis</i> * [<i>D. celsa</i> × <i>ludoviciana</i>], in contrast, is a VA native; semi-evergreen. <i>D. marginalis</i> *	Robust Wood Fern Boott’s Wood Fern Spinulose Wood Fern Log Fern Narrow Swamp Fern, Crested Wood Fern Broad Wood Fern Japanese Shield Fern, Autumn Fern Goldie's Wood Fern Southern Wood Fern Marginal Wood Fern	Semi-evergreen to evergreen; many species in this genus tolerant of dry sites & full shade Evergreen Mostly evergreen; consistently moist sites or wet sites Semi-evergreen; moist or wet sites Semi-evergreen to evergreen; moist or wet sites Semi-evergreen in our area; moist sites best Evergreen Deciduous Evergreen; moist or wet sites Evergreen; tolerates alkaline soil; tolerates drier sites than many ferns

<i>Osmunda cinnamomea</i> * (var. <i>cinnamomea</i> * is the common form in VA) <i>O. claytoniana</i> *	Cinnamon Fern	Deciduous; moist or wet sites; tolerates full shade
<i>O. regalis</i> * ('Purpurascens' is a selection of the European form; var. <i>spectabilis</i> * is the native form – sold as <i>O. regalis</i>)	Interrupted Fern Royal Fern	Deciduous; moist sites; tolerates alkaline soil Deciduous; moist or wet sites
<i>Phegopteris (Thelypteris) decursive-pinnata</i> <i>P. (Thelypteris) hexagonoptera</i> *	Japanese Beech Fern Broad Beech Fern	Deciduous Deciduous; tolerates full shade
<i>Polystichum acrostichoides</i> * <i>P. makinoi</i> <i>P. polyblepharum</i>	Christmas Fern Makino's Holly Fern Japanese Tassel Fern	Evergreen; most species in this genus tolerant of dry sites & full shade

FERNS MAINLY FOR NATURALISTIC USE, SUCH AS WOODLAND PLANTINGS

Scientific Name	Common Name	Comments
<i>Cystopteris protrusa</i> *	Lowland Bladder Fern, Woodland Fragile Fern	Deciduous; tolerates full shade
<i>Dennstaedtia punctilobula</i> *	Hay-scented Fern	Deciduous; light shade to part shade; tolerates relatively dry sites
<i>Matteuccia struthiopteris</i> *	Ostrich Fern	Deciduous; moist or wet sites; tolerates alkaline soil & full shade
<i>Onoclea sensibilis</i> *	Sensitive Fern	Deciduous; moist or wet sites; tolerates alkaline soil
<i>Thelypteris (Parathelypteris) noveboracensis</i> *	New York Fern	Deciduous
<i>Woodwardia areolata</i> *	Netted Chain Fern	Deciduous; moist or wet sites

Additional note: a fern that grows well in rocky areas & in rock gardens is *Cheilanthes lanosa** (Hairy Lip Fern; semi-evergreen to evergreen in our area)

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